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BECOMING-MACHINE

MASHINES, NONMUSIC

by Kilian Jörg & Jorinde Schulz (translation: Kilian Jörg)

"I want to be a machine. Arms to grab legs to walk no pain no thought.

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The music is particularly hard today. Uncompromisingly, the bass bends our chests, and the torpid beeps fill the vastness of the dark industrial hall. A deep, unyielding voice issues the inescapable command: “Move your body!” This is not a friendly suggestion like on the upper housefloor, this is a direct order, deviation impossible. We are pursuing a serious matter, the DJ’s face is unmistakable in this regard. We follow his lead: let the corners of our mouths drop, relax the cheeks, limbs marching in step. This is labour, not pleasure. We are slaves, half naked, in an incredibly hot Sunday machine.

Machine: An apparatus using mechanical power and having several parts, each with a definite function and together performing a particular task. (Oxford Dictionary)

When tiredly floating to the fringe of the dancefloor, this sometimes turns me on again: imagining how a pre-industrial being would feel on this former plant floor. The over-stimulus, the volume, the naked bodies would make a human of the seventeenth century shit her pants. *Sodom and Gomorrah*, she would cry in horror, prostrating from a heart attack.

THE EXCITEMENT OF ENTERING AND FEELING THE BOOM

BECAUSE OUR WORLD IS NOTHING BUT SMOOTH SURFACES, BECAUSE OUR WORLD IS NOTHING BUT SMOOTH

What makes the masses so attracted to Berghain? How is it, that so many people pay tribute to the illustrious circle of its regulars – despite the rather dragonic elitism and the optimized money machine that Berghain – like almost every bigger club – quite obviously is?

Here, one can meet an expert on Derrida as much as a Parisian model; One argues about the latest encryption technologies or drug mixtures; One encounters people who rarely leave their beloved forests and laboratory rats of quantum physics; straight-edgers and wastoids; autonomous Leftist and stock market speculators; Overachievers and couch potatoes – everything that differs in some way from the inert norm (or believe to do so) can be found here. This makes the Berghain-stamp appear like a recognition sign of some kind of freemasonry light. Whatever self-proclaimed avant-garde one is part of, with insider knowledge about Berghain one acquires respect in all of them. One places a small side note about the “secret ice cream parlor”, marks territory by saying that “one has never been rejected”, is slightly dreamy and dark ringed under the eyes, because one has – once more – “been there all weekend”.

ENTERING BERGHAIN, BECOMING MACHINE

We live in an age of smooth surfaces, we who inhabit the unreal prosperity bubbles of post-democracy – the open office landscapes, the electric (self-driving) car interiors, the few remaining production sites in which self-controlled robots do their work devoid of any human assistance. We know, this smoothness is deceptive – and yet we find no friction. Computer machines exert soft power, their monochrome cases are impossible to penetrate. They guide us like gentle governesses² onto the next track of our surfing routes with quick-click satisfiers. Or they are invisible, abstract machines, operating at intervals below our perception of time – sub-time spans within which volumes are moved which break into our world with nature-like force. Laptop and smartphone: inconspicuous companions who participate in every decision, who control streams of thought and life rhythms with their flashing notifications. Their windows guide our eyes, their keyboards were once designed for our hands – and now we are growing typing tools instead of fingers.

Intersecting layers of time – the 17th century shines through ours – are we the human machines conceived by our predecessors four centuries ago? Undoubtedly, the machines of our time would have overwhelmed any person in the age of baroque, but nonetheless, seeds of a “machinic thinking” lie exactly in this century. It began with the episteme of modernity, a division of powers based on the dualisms of society / nature, politics / science, men / women that enabled and fueled the rapid technological developments of the following centuries. Human machines can be found everywhere in the philosophical oeuvres of this period: La Mettrie’s radical materialism arises from the highly complex “Homme machine”; Descartes’ conceptualisation of machines reflect his epoch-making body-soul dualism – the mind is spooking in the (body) machine; The great spiritualist Leibniz goes as far as to conceive a living machine:

“§64 – Thus the organic body of each living being is a kind of divine machine or natural automaton, which infinitely surpasses all artificial automata. For a machine made by the skill of man is not a machine in each of its parts.”³

The Leibnizian body machine is a special one, since the concept of a *divine* machine allows the philosopher to think of organisms beyond pure mechanical causality and is thereby transcending the primitive idea of a rigid mechanism by a kind of zoom into infinity. The living organism is characterized by the fact that even in its smallest parts, it consists of functioning, aspiring, selfmoving units – machines – which in turn, consist of more functioning parts *ad infinitum*. This

property is based on the fact that for Leibniz, matter itself is infinitely divisible and alive.

"§67 – Each portion of matter may be conceived as like a garden full of plants and like a pond full of fishes. But each branch of every plant, each member of every animal, each drop of its liquid parts is also some such garden or pond."

By conceiving matter as organic and living, Leibniz immediately takes back his own sharp differentiation and hierarchy between a God-created human machine and a human-made artificial machine. Thus, at the interior of his monadology, we do already find the dormant idea of the cyborg: Leibniz is able to think the organic and the artificial in continuity by his concept of the machine – as self-moving structures whose parts function together as a unit. This is the seed of today's human-machine conflation, the transhumanisms and technoprostheses of everyday life, the moments when we think of psychology, the brain, the individual and the collective in computer metaphors – and, in return, dream of computer chips from organic material.

We have long since merged with our prostheses. Our smartphones accompany us everywhere as archives and enframings of our selves. In every heated discussion they stand ready to whisper things into our ears our organic memory has failed us with – the contemporary machine processes our photos, produces our music, monitors our stock exchanges for us. The hierarchy between organic-biological and artificial-mechanical machines seems to be gradually reversing. Are we, frail humans, still more divine than the increasingly efficient silicon plates? Did God *not* die after all, but merely turn away from us?

WILL GOD BE REINCARNATED IN THE TECHNOSPHERE?

In our everyday self-perception, it is often repressed that, since the nineteenth century, the machine has been the real actor and major innovator of so-called modernity. As driving force of the permanent revolutions that characterize this era, it has outshone the human and made him the passive edurer of a highly technological world.

We have become dependent of the veins and networks that our mechanical friends provide us with, and whose clear efficiency has enabled them to enslave us. Readily, and day by day we let ourselves be drawn through the subway shafts, elevator chimneys, traffic light intervals and hardwiring circuits – in most cases even without thinking about it. Everyday life requires a focus on other, more *important* things. Only in the rarest cases, if at all, do we realize that we have a deep admiration for our technological assistants. This blind spot of our modern being is a necessity for the survival of our subjective self-conception⁴. However, the love for the machine does not disappear as a result of this blindness, but instead finds its way into ritual expressions, which must displace their origin. This, for example, takes place in the weekly Berghain excess.

"you and your brain are two things two things – your brain is your machinery just like everything else is your machinery you and your brain are two things two things – your brain is your machinery just like everything else is your machinery you and your brain are two things two things – your brain is your machinery just like everything else is your machinery you and your brain are two things two things – your brain is your machinery just like everything else is your machinery"5

Where other dances require a more creative body arrangement, techno is about subsuming the movement to the bass: the best thing to do is to lose self awareness completely, and then, after hours, smilingly notice that you've just been completely automated: returning every fourth beat to the starting point, the arms mark the claps and snares, which always come at the exact same time – and the minimal changes, the bass-outs and bass-drops, we automatically react to them, a march on the spot, an army going nowhere.

And even if we leave the dance floor, we do not stop becoming machines. In the darkrooms, we satisfy our drives mechanically: Put our genitals in holes, whose bearers' faces we ideally do not know. Fuck and get fucked without the annoying inconvenience of respect for people. We savour objectification. Fuck like a machine and be fucked as a machine. Where one, in more sensual lovemaking, plays subtly with ones' drives and impulses, as part of the machine one treats those stimuli no different from an automaton treating his programming: command, execution; Horny, fucking. The tried and tested effect of power-heat-coupling.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-50549-0002
Foto: Weis, Günter | 19. Oktober 1957



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-50549-0002
Foto: Weis, Günter | 19. Oktober 1957

»19.10.1957 Equipped for winter: Since mid-September, 6,000 apartment units, schools, nurseries and wash houses in Stalinallee and the new buildings in the hinterland up to Leninallee and Ostbahnhof have been heated by the Rüdersdorfer Straße district heating plant. The heating season usually ends in the first days of May. The hot water supply takes place throughout the year. In addition, the district heating plant generates several million kilowatt hours of electricity annually. Shown here: view of the coal loading bridge. Here, the fuel – exclusively lignite – is taken from the wagons to the stockpiles and from there transported via conveyor belt to the power plant.«⁶

The everyday calibration of the body with caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, Viagra, Psychotropic drugs, sleeping pills and

sugars continues to become more chemically refined by professional Berghainians. In a constant, reflexive process, the body machine is perfectly calibrated to provide maximum performance and experiences. The toilets become the central spot of the balancing act in the eternal search for the perfect mix that makes the evening really go off: I feel a bit tired, let's rather take some speed. Oh great, Ketamin would go well with that, because solo it's too much of a downer, but like that ... uhhh yeah ... but now the whole thing is becoming a bit too much, rather a little spliff to slow it down. Okay, better, and now I'm starting to feel pretty horny – so let's take some GHB and – with a relaxed anus – to the darkroom! After the third time I feel a little drained and wonder, was that a bit too much of that wonderful G? I'd better be looking for some speed, for we do not want that heart of ours to stop.

THE BOXES ARE LIGHT UP EVERY 16TH BEAT – LIKE SOLEMN IDOLS THEY LOOK DOWN ONTO US

"And then again: the sound, an access to absolutely every desired state of consciousness. Everything you want can be produced at short notice, while the black in front of your eyes is occasionally flickered by a stroke of light. It's about your cunning and these moments of unstoppable self-loss, in which nothing else is confirmed but that, in this mass of Polytoxicomaniacs slipping uncontrolledly through the shit, you are no longer a human, but a dissolving piece of generality. You melt, let yourself fall from one wall to the opposite and then into the arms of the all-enabling bass. It pervades your muscles and you shine through it, driven to the utmost by your digression of the self-imposed basic rules."⁷

BOOM BOOM BOOM – we operate in the centrally controlled rhythm and when Berghain once more is as tightly packed as it usually is (the money machine⁸ guarantees it to be filled to the very limit with the no doubt always too many in the cue) we have to adapt our dance moves to each other and synchronize. Like gearwheels, we need to interlock to maximize in the minimum of space, to give our ecstatic movements the greatest possible freedom in the cool calculation of machine music. When a dancer changes her movements, all the neighbors have to react: they bump into each other in these new spatial conditions and have to find new sequences of movement that no longer intersect with those of their neighbors. A permanent nesting process of the interlocking structure, and every new change, that itself is only the adaptation to the adaptation to an adaption, causes further waves of adjustments of the dance moves. The whole club is an elastic wheel structure, hypersensitive and prepared for every input. We wobble, we dance, we freak out like machines and, conjoined, reach transhuman ecstasy. As in Leibniz' monadology under the protective cover of a metaphysical entity called God, as part of the club's fabric we feel the most perfect order, the preestablished harmony of all substances in which each particle expresses the whole.

"§69 – Thus there is nothing fallow, nothing sterile, nothing dead in the universe, no chaos, no confusion save in appearance, somewhat as it might appear to be in a pond at a distance, in which one would see a confused movement and, as it were, a swarming of fish in the pond, without separately distinguishing the fish themselves."

»Machinery, you know, the idea of machines and electronics, and industry, specially coming from Detroit once again, industry is the main focus of just about anybody who lives here. At one point or another, everybody has a family member who works in the industry, so the effect is indirectly there. It's not necessarily a positive effect, it's also a very unaffectionate, cold effect, a machine has no love nor any feeling, and sometimes the people working for these machines end up having no feeling nor love, because they are working relentless hours, they are putting in total commitment to something that is giving nothing back. We tended to find the idea of making music subconsciously, you see it was all subconscious, there was never anything but a subconscious thought, a subconscious emotion. We took these same ideas of machinery, not necessarily the synthesizer, but it was more or less the *sound* of the synthesizer, that we created our own sounds, and all these sounds – subconsciously – came from the idea of industry, of mechanics, of machines, of electronics.«⁹

Perhaps one of the hidden driving forces of Club-hypes is thus a ritual metonymy experience in the yet still (or just so overcome) industrial age. The music of the motorcity Detroit adapted quickly to the rhythms of the machinery that caused its boom and collapse: the Motown is the music of assembly line workers, a creative appropriation of the monotone work done all day at Ford, GM and Co. Techno emerged from the legacy of this tradition – but only after the collapse of the industrial heyday, as a result of which the city shrank from four to one million inhabitants. What, accelerated by social unrest, began in Detroit, continued throughout the so-called West after the outsourcing of industrial production. At a time when the "industrial revolution" had moved away from its countries of origin and the disused industrial complexes had to find new uses, we fell for the irresistible appeal of the grand old factory halls. In them, we pursue a reduced, radical musical mimesis of the machines that left us. We started to adore places like Berghain just when the colossal turbines disappeared from the premises of the former thermal power station¹⁰.

It is as if all the pounding movements, the hissing and fizzling, the thunderbolts of the old machines are epigenetically inscribed into us – our bodies have not yet completely transitioned into the feedback loops of the personal computer. If factory work was ever alienated, today we seek that alienation. We have not quite digested the transition to Post-

Fordism yet¹¹. The proletarian experience, as described by Marx, its submission to automatic cycles¹², can be experienced with the purchase of the stamp at the entrance counter. (Hammer and sickle are projected in red color onto the high walls as visuals.)

Much more incredible than all the sex-orgies and fetishes that superficially make up the club's scandalousness, the real dark desire of this place lies in exactly this: one can love the machine and go even much further in one's *machinophilia*: become a machine oneself. Surrounded by sound machines whose performance allegedly is one of highest in the world, so that, on normal club nights, not more than 10-20% are exploited¹³, the beat continues unendingly – and we are absorbed by its pounding and ramming. There is a desire buried deep in us to be as efficient and strong as the inventory of this former machine house, to which we indulge ourselves unrestrainedly.



Previously the machines were the hardware, we the software. Where the stomping production needed exterior intelligent feedback to function flawlessly, we humans gladly became their masters. Inventor-fathers proudly eyed their hissing little ones, that should smoothen and roll the world platt. The proletarians among us served them, helped them where they were yet too rough, and were subjected to their production cycles. Meanwhile, the machines have their own software. They have emancipated themselves from us, their semi-intelligent feedback loops are more and more self-sufficient, so that we "subjects" will soon be no more than the milieu from which they feed¹⁴. We – the left behind – are like parents who have not quite coped with their children having moved out: we long for them and want to help them where they no longer need help.

In Berghain we celebrate this reversal of our power relation, experience the unconditional submission to the machines with our own bodies. Subsumed under the incessant pounding, we allow ourselves to be entrained by Leibniz's microscopical zoom into the infinity of matter, to let ourselves be completely absorbed by the machine. As much as Leibniz's Baroque philosophy still appeals to us¹⁵, his musical contemporaries shimmer equally through the technoid machine music. Their superimposed patterns and subtle variations, which stretch time into the seemingly infinite, are reminiscent of Baroque fugue compositions of polyphonically overlapping lines, which progress endlessly in imperceptible metamorphosis. In the club-feeling we experience

THE TRANSITIONS OF THE DANCEFLOOR FROM RAW TO TENDER MAGIC, FROM THE MERCILESS BELLY OF THE MACHINE TO INFINITE FELXIBLE, COVETOUS, WINDING BODIES.

From hard to trance, where the machine-like forcefully transitions into the swelling, the swaying, the living, the wavy. If only one dances long enough ...

For let someone say that machines have no feelings¹⁶. Do you really believe that the perfectly synchronized interplay of urban machines leaves them cold? Do you really think the underground does not laugh when it devours you? That the electric toothbrush does not experience her orgasm when you introduce her orally?

In the club we can feel this superhuman joy. Beyond the subjective person we left in the cloakroom or in the latest after two to three pills, we can trace the joys of our modern gods. Not the man-machine or the machine-man. Away from the subjective – to the machinic! The real machines may have disappeared from this former industrial hall – but only so that we ourselves have a room to become machine.

We want to be shaken by the machine, as one human-mass-crowd become a machine whose links perfectly fit together, whose movements are synchronized, breathless, eternal. We all become cogwheels, circles of alternating vulvas and penises, which bring each other to industrial-collective orgasm. We do not know after some time, when we started and when we will stop. It does not matter. We are in the machine cycle. Fucking in the darkroom, more boursts and galvanic pushes, and suddenly you may turn into one Living, winding, licking thing, that is no longer just trampling and pounding. The incandescence of the iron furnace is turned into glowing skins, skins rubbed against each other, tongues stuck into mouths and fists into wide open asses and fingers everywhere in all openings, we have penetrated the machine, become part of it and can let our ego go – we already stripped it off carefully at the beginning and now let it go completely into the wild kicking, where it does no longer matter if we have closed our eyes in introversion or if they are wide open.

OTHERWISE, IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE THAT EVERY MATERIAL PARTICLE CAN EXPRESS THE WHOLE UNIVERSE

This is the translation of an excerpt of the book „Die Clubmaschine“ which will be released in German this spring at TEXTEM Hamburg. A full English translation has yet to find a publisher.

1 Translation of Blixa Bargeld's lyrics in Esther Brinkmann's "Maschine" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xbWB7dosn0)

2 Ultimate image of an exciting asexuality, she raises the children (= power woman) and is in

her sterility erotic. Just like the iPhone.

3 G. W. Leibniz, Monadology (first published 1714)

4 Gabriel Tarde already wrote about such a necessary blind spot of freedom in his magnum opus "laws of imitation" of 1890: *"in our democratic pride, [...] we err in flattering ourselves that we have become less credulous and docile, less imitative, in short, than our ancestors."* (Gabriel Tarde, *The laws of imitation*, p. 78)

5 Lyrics from the track Brain Machinery from Quantec

6 Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-50549-0003. Fotograf: Günter Weiß, 19.10.1957

7 Helene Hegemann: Axolotl Roadkill, Ullstein: Berlin 2010. S. 73 (translation by Kilian Jörg)

8 The officially declared income of Berghain OstGut GmbH was 7,88 Mio. Euro in 2013 -with rising tendency <http://de.statista.com/unternehmen/400243/berghain-ostgut-gmbh>

9 Kevin Saunderson in the documentary »Universal Techno« by Dominique Deluze from 1996

10 Also the art and music genre *Industrial* has only really emerged in England and Germany after the peak of Industrialization has been long past and the Industry was outsourced to other countries.

11 To use the terminology of Boltanski and Chiapello, which regard the transformation of capitalism since the late 1960ies as a transition from Fordism (work based on the division of labour through normalized and as far as possible reduced tasks on the conveyor belt) to Post-Fordism (new creative industries, individualism as self-management and self-marketing, transforming oneself into a product).

12 "But, once adopted into the production process of capital, the means of labour passes

through different metamorphoses, whose culmination is the machine, or rather, an automatic system of machinery (system of machinery: the automatic one is merely its most complete, most adequate form, and alone transforms machinery into a system), set in motion by an automaton, a moving power that moves itself; this automaton consisting of numerous mechanical and intellectual organs, so that the workers themselves are cast merely as its conscious linkages." from Karl Marx's 'Fragment über Maschinen',

13 S. The Rolling Stones Magazine, The Secretive, Sex-Fueled World of Techno's Coolest Club

14 "The environment is us, the environment is people. Instead of treating people like the subject let's treat people like the environment in which the subject evolves". Phillip Mirowski in "Should Economists be Experts in Markets, or Experts in Human Nature?", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfbVPDNI7V4>

15 Compare Deleuze, Gilles: The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque. Bloomsbury: London 1993.

16“To be a machine, to feel, to think, to know how to distinguish good from bad, as well as blue from yellow, in a word, to be born with an intelligence and a sure moral instinct, and to be but an animal, are therefore characters which are no more contradictory, than to be an ape or a parrot and to be able to give oneself pleasure” excerpt from Julien Offray de La Mettrie: Man a Machine from 1747

Foto: Bernhard Weber

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